

AFGHANISTAN

Salman Jan, IF representative, recently returned from Afghanistan where he visited Borgegai, the community IF supports. Below is a copy of the speech he recently delivered to IF supporters in Sydney and Adelaide.



Salman moving between villages in Borgegai

Let me thank all of you for helping a disadvantaged community in a remote mountainous village in Afghanistan. As an Afghan-Australian, and as a Hazara refugee, I am so much honoured to have this precious opportunity for raising the concerns of the poorest community of the poorest ethnic group of the poorest nation on Earth.

Thanks for having me and thanks for coming here to listen to the cause of those who have been persecuted, ignored and neglected in the course of their history and in present time repeatedly.

First of all, I would like to tell you a bit about the school that I have identified for Indigo Foundation to support. To give you a better picture of the project I will tell you a brief story of my last year's visit in Afghanistan.

In March 2003, I crossed the Pakistan-Afghan border in a hope to see some positive changes in my motherland. I by-passed Qandahar and Ghazni cities to get to Kabul. Next day I was in Kabul where Kabulies were celebrating Afghan New Year. I saw a huge crowd of people. My first impression was that at last they are free

and they truly enjoy their freedom. Men felt free and happy to shave their beards and women were allowed to take off their borquas and go to schools and uni. I was overwhelmed to see things I was hoping and dying to see. I was overjoyed, I cried as I distanced myself from the crowd. It was an unforgettable experience.

The following 20 days were really one of my best experiences in a city that I loved and I missed. I spoke with people from all walks of life. Men, women and children. Kabulis and outsiders, all had stories of horror and pain of the past few years under the Taliban and they were all very happy with the current changes.

I also visited a number of government ministries, NGOs, schools and Kabul University. As I entered in Uni once again my tears followed the crowd of boys and girls who were walking proudly on the footpaths and green areas. I thought to myself is this the Kabul where girls were meant to be locked behind the doors? But truly things had changed and the people's attitude too.

During the last few days of my stay I met few people from a village called Borgegai. Borgegai is located in the District of Nahour in Ghazni Province in Hazarajhat. Among the people I met were five of my school mates from so many years ago and they were now teaching in the village schools. My parents are originally from that village and my aunty is still living there.

As a result of the contacts I made, Indigo Foundation has started to support the schools in Borgegai by buying 5,900 text books. Last month I visited Afghanistan again. This time I also visited the village of Borgegai on behalf of Indigo Foundation to see how the funds were spent, and to look at the other needs of the school, which Indigo Foundation might be able to assist.

On the way from Kabul to the village and during my stay I witnessed two major changes in those areas that I can't wait to tell you what they were. First, the end of gun culture, which is now limited only to the warlords and their associates. The majority of the society has already given up that nasty culture. At least guns are not a fashion any more. It is not a cause of celebration in weddings, birthdays and other happy occasions as it used to be. Every single individual seeks a gun-free zone to think of overcoming the hardship of a daily life. And more importantly, carrying a book has become the fashion of today among boys and girls in the cities and villages too. In most sub-villages of Borgegai, for example, middle-aged men are employed as shepherds because finding a child for that job is too hard as they all go to school.

Secondly, the attitude of Mullahs have changed. Mullahs are the religious leaders and they have been mainly associated with Fundamentalist – Islamic Parties who were encouraging the traditional Islamic teaching and Mujahedin way of life. Their teachings, during the Afghan revolution and afterwards gave birth to violence, Islamic extremism, terrorism, warlordism, gun culture and so many other ugly faces in Afghanistan and abroad. Apart from Quranic-religious studies, Mullahs were opposing the normal schooling for children. But now with the wave of democratic changes and global pressures on Islamic extremism, they have chosen a different motto and strategy. I have personally heard from a few of them saying 'before we were doing Jihad with guns and now we do it with pens and books'. And because of their ability in literacy and numeracy and the urgent need for teaching staff, Mullahs are employed as school teachers and they only teach the school subjects.



Children at Borgegai school

After talking of those two changes, let me tell you briefly about my visit to the schools. After 12 long hours drive from Kabul on dusty, mountainous roads I got to the village. I stayed in the village for 11 days. I visited six primary schools, two secondary and one high school. I met school principals, teachers and students from those schools. I also met so many villagers – families, elders, youths, children and even some village businessmen.

The cooperation and very warm hospitality of villagers, school staff, and students was more than enough to give some warmth to the freezing weather and some ease to the harsh condition of the village.

The villagers were making a living with no easy means. Their areas have been hit hard by drought and the weather is extremely cold. Some sub villages are very lucky if the United Nations agencies have dug a well for them to facilitate drinking water. Others carry a few litres of water for miles on their donkeys to provide the family with drinking water. 80 per cent of the village farms are dry and people have few, if any, livestock in the village. Farms and animal products, the two main sources of income and job opportunities, have almost disappeared. About 90 per cent of the village income comes from outside. There is no electricity and travel, in most areas of the village is only possible on donkeys. These are some examples of their harsh life.

There are about 3,900 students studying there with almost no facilities, travelling up to three hours of walking from some parts of the village. The girls make up to 40 per cent of the students. The lack of professional teaching staff and poor management is deeply felt and it can be disappointing too.

The girls unfortunately have a bigger problem, which is the tribe's religious views. It is in favour of them only until they show the first sign of adolescence. This is an issue which we in Indigo Foundation are going to have to give some careful thought to, because Indigo Foundation is committed to equality between men and women. [Note: Borgegai School itself welcomes girls at all levels. However, some villages do not want to send their girls to a co-educational school when they reach adolescence].

The books have been distributed very well. The three existing tribes of the village were very thankful for IF support and cooperation. With those books we have directly helped 700 students. IF has already made a big name in the district and enjoys a good reputation as an Australian NGO. There is one old and half destroyed school building from pre-war and the rest of the students are studying under the tents provided by UNICEF or in the Mosques.

The schools are educating Hazara children. With such a harsh and difficult past it is not a surprise that Hazarajhat schools are suffering from the shortages of teachers, staffs, school buildings, books and other facilities. Unfortunately there is no government funding in remote-rural areas yet.

Men and women of the village were so committed to keep and better facilitate their schools despite facing all those difficulties. They truly had traded their guns for books and pens and if they had one wish for the new future that was definitely arming their boys and girls with knowledge and skills.

The villagers had that wish and in return IF gave them some hope and courage too. Together we have discussed the future IF financial and non-financial supports. We identified two priorities. First, assisting them to get qualified teachers from the cities and facilitating the schools with chairs, books, tables and other basic needs if possible. Second, working towards making a girls only high school which helps the girls to continue their schooling in high school. I am so happy to say that we have already set up a teachers training program in the village.

And finally, I have always believed that the only ultimate and effective key to success is

education. That is why I looked for an educational project for Indigo to support.



Boys at assembly in Borgegai

What next for IF and Borgegai School?

We believe Salman's visit and his findings reinforce the importance of the principles under which we operate. Not only that a small amount of money can have a large impact but that personal and trusted contacts with the community are essential. And, visits to communities are invaluable. As Salman notes in his speech, teacher capacity is a problem. It was he that recommended a teacher training program be established. The program has the experienced and qualified teachers training the local teachers. This program began while he was there, and teachers must attend training as part of their employment agreement. Salman was also able to confirm our *Guiding Principles* had been embraced. Through discussions with Salman about the need for financial transparency, village and school representatives proposed to nominate a financial trustee, independent of the school but respected and trusted within the village. We believe this demonstrates that our *Guiding Principles* are not just rhetoric, but enable the delivery of positive and practical development assistance.

We believe we have a unique opportunity to work with directly with the community and the school to address their key challenges of improving teacher capacity and girls access to education as well as the provision of text books.

IF is committed to supporting Borgegai School for (at least) the next three years. The Management Committee will be discussing the nature and level of this support at our next meeting in August. Following this we will negotiate a three year Commitment Agreement with the School, and work at raising the required funds.

Politics & security in Afghanistan – a snapshot

Over the last year there have been impressive gains made in Afghanistan, but with drought and increasing insecurity it remains extremely fragile. In January, Afghanistan adopted a new constitution and in October will hold its first democratic elections for many years. This, alongside economic growth of 30 per cent in 2002/03, the establishment of a judicial system, rehabilitation of the primary school system (for girls and boys) are the 'positive' elements of Afghanistan's development. Ongoing abuse of human rights including violence against women, a weak judicial system, limited employment opportunities and housing and drought affecting 80 per cent of households represent the 'negatives'. International assistance in terms of peacekeeping forces and funding and has been extremely disappointing.

Probably the most important concern in Afghanistan is chronic insecurity. The situation continues to deteriorate, with the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) noting on the 16 June that Afghanistan is **still a country in conflict**. There has been a resurgence of 'warlordism' due to limited control of the Central government outside Kabul, and the refinancing and resupplying of warlords by the US which undertook joint operations with them as part of their Taliban attack strategy. As a result, regional commanders are consolidating and deepening their economic and political power and the disarmament and demilitarisation of militia is much slower than hoped. Indeed, the Minister of Defence continues to maintain his own militia. **Taliban** attacks in the south and south east are increasing and moving northwards. The UN and international development agencies now consider nearly 2/3 of Pashtun belt as 'no go' area. **Crime** continues to increase, unhampered by a weak criminal justice system and the **narcotics** trade is flourishing, reaching levels of production similar to pre-Taliban days. Nearly half of Afghanistan's \$4.5 billion economy comes from opium cultivation and trafficking.

What of the international forces?

There are two groups of international forces. They have neither the mandate or the numbers to significantly reduce insecurity.

- **Coalition** forces are deployed for the sole purpose of ousting the Taliban. They do not engage in any peacekeeping activities.
- **ISAF** - the force of 6,500 has, to date, been almost exclusively in Kabul. 1,000 of these troops are used to protect foreign embassies. The ratio of peacekeepers to populations in Rwanda, East Timor and Kosovo was approximately 1:70. In Afghanistan it is 1: 5,000. Afghanistan has pleaded with the international community to send more troops, but promises of an expanded ISAF role under the relatively new NATO command were not met until 29 June. Even so, numbers remain woefully small, with an increase to only 8,000 troops.

Insecurity affects everything: from elections to reconstruction to women's rights to drugs. In particular, it contributes to the ongoing and systematic abuse of human rights. Government officials, the police, soldiers, warlords, and the Taliban all perpetrate such abuses. Indeed, some human rights abusers are in key government roles, and the Supreme Court remains under the control of a fundamentalist. This means the justice system tends to be a source of violation rather than mechanism for providing justice. Many women have, again, been forced out of jobs and schools. They continue to suffer harassment and sexual assault. Legal and practical protection remains very limited. Rape, for example, has not been criminalised.

As a direct result of this insecurity, many humanitarian agencies have withdrawn, leaving vulnerable populations without access to health care, improved water and sanitation or general infrastructure development. 29 humanitarian and construction workers have been assassinated since beginning of the year.

The Constitution and Elections

On January 4, following a *Loya Jirga* (meeting of the *Grand Council*, which brings together representatives of all ethnic and factional groups), and despite widespread intimidation of attendees, Afghanistan enacted a new constitution. This process was a real test of the legitimacy of Central Government, and its success represents a major achievement. That Grand Councils even occur is a significant breakthrough in Afghan politics.

The constitution is a permanent foundation for the re-establishment of law. It allows for extensive presidential power, reflecting the need to strengthen the Centralised Government and find a balance between authoritarianism and overcoming factionalism. Importantly, it does not allow for Regional Councils. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* has been codified and men and women are explicitly equal. However, the role of Islam is unclear. While the country is now called the **Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**, the constitution does not define Islamic principles, leaving this to the courts. Thus, the role of Islam is untested. For example, Article 130 states that in absence of an explicit statute, the Supreme Court should decide in accordance with Hannafi Law, (which gives a woman's testimony half the weight of a man's). As noted above, a fundamentalist heads the Supreme Court. Further, there is no guarantee of religious freedom.

The elections in October will be critical to the success of political reform and to long-term stability. By mid-June, voter registration was just over 4 million (out of 9.5) and 36% were women. For the elections to be considered credible, 70 per cent will need to be registered. This will be difficult: lack of roads and communication facilities, the terrain and security make registration difficult and risky. A month ago, 16 peasants were killed by the Taliban when found to be carrying voter registration cards. The legitimacy of the elections is also compromised by the continuing impunity of human rights abusers who are standing for elections. A robust international presence is vital before the elections. Indeed, part of the reason for delaying elections from June was because NATO did not keep promises to provide troops earlier. Lack of international support in terms of both funding and security forces at this critical juncture in Afghanistan history is appalling. For more detailed information see <http://www.crisisweb.org/>

Microfinance

Susan Engel

Microfinance is currently one of the hot topics in development. Starting from modest roots in Bangladesh in the 1970s, there are now over 200 microfinance organisations (MFOs) in some 58 countries. The World Bank has (not surprisingly) jumped on the bandwagon and the President, James Wolfensohn, is promoting an expansion and 'scaling up' of microfinance efforts. They are now funding projects that develop and fund MFOs as well as assisting with the creation of the appropriate national regulatory frameworks for microfinance.

Microfinance operates via the formation of small savings groups of approximately five people, after a few weeks of demonstrating their savings capacity a limited number (generally two) of the group are eligible for loans. If these loans are re-paid in line with the MFOs rules, other members of the group become eligible for loans. It is worth noting there is collective responsibility for loan repayment, this collective responsibility also serves as the MFOs 'collateral' for the loan (Hassan, 2002: 208).

The loans are mostly small, repayments commence immediately and there are relatively short repayment periods (i.e. four months). Interest rates, while substantially lower than those of local moneylenders, are generally around the 20 per cent per annum mark. Nevertheless, MFOs generally require ongoing subsidies and support to keep them operating because of their high transaction costs (ibid: 210). One of the largest transaction costs is the field manager: there are one to 15-20 villages and transport and associated costs are often high.

There have been a lot of positive stories written about the impact of microfinance, especially on women - they receive over 75 per cent of microfinance and their repayment rate is over 85 per cent (Fernando, 1997:153). However, a deeper look suggests things are not as rosy as sometimes suggested. Jude Fernando, in a review of MFOs in the home of microfinance, Bangladesh, notes that a number of studies have found a significant number of the loans provided to women are, in fact, controlled by men, the vast majority of field

officers are men and women are not involved in MFO planning, implementation or evaluation (ibid: 155-6). More problematically, her research shows that the group system results in range of pressure tactics to ensure repayment including control and regulation of household consumption (ibid: 160). Difficulties meeting repayments can increase the conflict within a household.

Loans are often not used for the purpose for which they were made and the need for immediate weekly repayments means, where they are invested in money-making schemes (as opposed to used for immediate consumption, e.g. medical costs, school books, etc), these need to provide immediate returns (ibid: 161). Often new loans are made to repay existing ones. One of the most interesting results of this study, was the:

MFOs lack of success in reaching the poorest of the poor and that microfinance does not disturb women's position in the existing division of labor in the productive or reproductive spheres. In other words, domestication of development through micro-enterprises reinforces existing relations of power in private and public domains (ibid: 162).

So what are the lessons in this for IF? Most importantly it is a reminder of how important our *Guiding Principles* are and that community ownership and equity require more than just lip service in project design and implementation. While its worth evaluating new approaches and designs, it reaffirms that there are no easy solutions in development.

Selected Bibliography

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Centro Feto Oecussi Enclave & Indigo Foundation

Jennifer Spence, Project Manager, East Timor

Once a year we review each of our projects, identifying and analysing key issues, risks and lessons learned. We do this in relation to our *Guiding Principles*, strategic approach to community development and project management processes. These are discussed in detail by the IF Management Committee and then sent for discussion and feedback to the organisation we are supporting. We see this process as an important way of improving our understanding of, and approach to, development issues and therefore our support to communities. Of key importance to us is the effectiveness of our relationship building strategies.

Centro Feto ('Women's Group') Oecussi Enclave is a local women's organization in Oecussi, East Timor. It provides support to the most vulnerable groups of women in Oecussi – victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. It also works to empower women and girls by combating domestic violence by developing an understanding of gender issues throughout the whole community. IF has been supporting Centro Feto since 2002.

The Management Committee undertook the 2004 review of Centro Feto in May. We are very happy with our partnership with Centro Feto, feel our support is well used, and are impressed with Centro Feto's community development activities. We are awaiting feedback from Centro Feto on our findings, and will send a copy of the final review to IF supporters in September. We hope they provide some insight into the way we work, and some of the challenges we have faced during the last year. In this newsletter, for new members and supporters we introduce you to Centro Feto, and for existing supporters refresh your memory about what Centro Feto does, how they do it and why.

The Partnership

In March 2002 Indigo Foundation and Centro Feto signed a three year Commitment Agreement. The purpose of the Agreement was to develop a relationship between Centro Feto

and IF *'intended to benefit the communities in Oecussi, by promoting and advancing the empowerment of women and girls in the community, and establishing services for women and children who are affected by domestic violence.'*

Why Domestic Violence.....

When there are so many other challenges facing the population of East Timor?

A key **IF principle** is to provide support to **community identified** development priorities. In 2001, during consultations towards the development of the national constitution, women across the country identified domestic violence as one of the major issues preventing the development of women in East Timor. In Oecussi, the United Nations facilitated a series of meetings and planning sessions about the needs of women. They were attended by local women, churches, political leaders and non-government organisations, and the need for a women's advisory and victim support centre; basic awareness raising of the role of women; and the importance of strengthening local women's organisations were all identified. **Centro Feto was established as a result.**

Today, domestic violence is still one of the major crimes committed in East Timor.

- A recent survey showed 51 per cent of women admitted to being subject to domestic violence;
- Only 40-50 per cent of cases are reported to police. The East Timor Police Force report 60 per cent of call-outs in Oecussi relate to gender-based violence; and
- Of 148 cases of violence against women due to be heard in Dili District Court, 104 were withdrawn.

A second key IF principle is working with **marginalised populations**. Women suffering from gender-based violence are a very new beneficiary group in East Timor. They are an inherently difficult group to target as gender-based violence usually happens behind closed doors and is often seen as a 'private' issue. It does however, have far-reaching negative

development impacts on families. These include injury, reduced ability to care for infants, loss of productivity, and loss of income.

Women in Oecussi do not traditionally play an active role in community or development affairs. Women's literacy is very low and there are few opportunities for women to generate income and become independent. As a result, many women feel powerless to act or express their views.

IF support



Lilyana Hui (CFEO) & Jenny Spence (IF)

Under the Commitment Agreement, we provide A\$5,000 per year for three years to Centro Feto. We also provide support for the development of Centro Feto's organisational capacity through annual visits to Oecussi by an IF representative, as well as other technical assistance if requested. This may, for example, include facilitating links with other organisations. For extra technical assistance we budget up to \$2,500 per year.

Two visits have been conducted so far. They focused on strategic planning, proposal writing, budgeting and building relationships with donors. A third will be undertaken in August this year and will concentrate on monitoring and evaluation as well as report writing. In addition to capacity building, the visits are used to develop strong personal links with the staff of Centro Feto and a better understanding of the needs of the community of Oecussi. They also provide IF and Centro Feto the opportunity to jointly monitor Centro Feto activities. Each visit costs up to \$2,500.

Therefore, IF's annual budget for Centro Feto is \$10,000, although to date actual spending has been approximately \$7,500

What does Centro Feto do?

Domestic violence is entrenched in East Timor. It is a private issue, traditionally dealt with via customary law. According to Centro Feto, the reasons for its ongoing occurrence are:

- the notion of women being owned – bride prices are still paid in East Timor;
- the low status of women;
- the informal justice system does not recognise it as a serious crime, and there is a lack of understanding and access to the formal justice system; and
- jealousy, drunkenness.

Centro Feto seeks to address these causes, whilst offering support to those who suffer the consequences of violence. They do this by:

- Providing **mediation and counselling** services for the victims of domestic violence and their families;
- Running the **Safe House** for women and children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault;
- Conducting **workshops** in villages in all sub-districts about gender and domestic violence. The workshops consist of presentations, drama and question and answer sessions. They are conducted in cooperation with UN Human Rights, the East Timor Police Force, and a local Men's Group Against Violence;
- Providing **training** for other groups in Oecussi (local, international NGOs and village groups) on gender and domestic violence issues; and
- **Campaigning against domestic violence** and for women's rights and women's empowerment in Oecussi and more broadly in East Timor. This includes making radio presentations, participating in newspaper interviews, developing information material, organising International Women's Day celebrations, and participating in consultations with government and other civil society groups for the development of legislation on domestic violence.

Centro Feto also supports four small widows groups, who produce traditional weavings (tais) as an income generating activity.

What is special about Centro Feto?

Centro Feto is both inventive and insightful in its approach to domestic violence. They recognise sustainable behaviour change will only occur over the long-term, and to make this change happen the problem must be tackled from a variety of different angles. They work to influence the community through a continuous program of education (aimed at building peer pressure against violence) and lobbying for improved legislation. At the same time they work through existing cultural systems (a legislative approach is often not understood or appropriate). They also actively cooperate and coordinate activities with local men's anti violence groups.

a) Working with men

Centro Feto collaborates with male community leaders and men's groups to address violence. By working with the FFSO Men's Group and the East Timor Police Service in delivering sensitisation workshops Centro Feto has been able to attract a large number of attendees (between 60 – 100). This amount of

community interest has been consistent since Centro Feto began delivering the workshops in early 2002. It has led to widespread community exposure to gender and the issues associated with gender-based violence. It lays the groundwork for long-term attitudinal change towards gender-based violence.

Establishing alliances with key male leaders has also helped Centro Feto to avoid being seen as an organization looking to 'break-up families'. Anecdotal reports often suggest many domestic violence organizations are viewed negatively because their focus is mainly on encouraging women to leave violent households rather than working to increase the communities understanding of the detrimental effects (in terms of economics, health, productivity etc) that gender-based violence can have on families.

Increasingly, Centro Feto is invited to play a mediation role in domestic violence cases alongside male community leaders which suggests there is already a growing acceptance of the work of Centro Feto and a recognition of the need to protect women's rights.

b) Working with tradition

While recognizing gender-based violence is against the law and should be reported to the police, Centro Feto encourages communities to work through the Adat system (traditional cultural structure) to overcome violence, where appropriate. Their involvement in this system is to ensure a better result for the woman: punishment of the male under customary law is often only just an exchange of goods given to the family of the women to restore relations. By doing this Centro Feto is slowly - but surely - achieving better outcomes for women and developing the respect of the community.

c) Services to the sub-districts

As there is no public transport or communication services outside Oecussi town, women in sub-districts are often unable to access basic services. Centro Feto visits the sub-districts regularly to advocate for women's empowerment. This also performs an important linkage role between the communities and the services offered by the District Administration and other international organizations as Centro Feto provides informal feedback each week on the problems or issues raised by the communities, and women in particular.

These methods and this service have never been offered before in Oecussi, either by government or other local or international organisations.

World Bank Finalists

The multi-layered approach taken by Centro Feto to domestic violence was recognised internationally, when IF and Centro Feto - in partnership - were chosen last year as one of 178 finalists from a field of over 2000 applications in the World Bank Development Marketplace competition. There were no finalists from the Pacific region, few from Asia and one of only two applications focussed on domestic violence. We were flown to Washington to present Centro Feto's work to a panel of judges.

We were not successful in gaining funding (only 50 grants were available) but our selection as a finalist confirms that the work of Centro Feto is seen as exemplary – the proposals were judged on the basis of their innovation and ability to be replicated elsewhere.



Postcards from the Edge

Leanne Black.

Leanne is our 2003 Development Award recipient and is currently working on her PhD in East Timor. She will be visiting Centro Feto shortly.

*Postcards from the edge "of what?" you may ask. Imagine yourself sitting (comfortably) on the edge of a cliff. In front of you are magnificent vistas whose territories lay largely unexplored. There is something alluring about taking a journey into the unknown. You become mesmerised by the possibilities. From your privileged vantage point, there seems to be nothing between you and those wonderful views; and therein lies your problem: there *is nothing* between you and those wonderful views. The fact that a vast expanse of nothingness exists between you and your dreams brings you down to earth and you are faced with a decision. Either stay sitting where you are, and be content to look, or figure out a way to span the void that separates you from your desires. Thus 'postcards from the edge' will become a regular feature in IF's newsletters; written by someone who often finds herself precariously perched between her love of vistas and her desire to explore some of them.*

For example, my research was borne from one of those 'on the edge' experiences. The concept of 'capacity building' is very appealing: that an 'enabling environment' will facilitate development in poor countries. I spent a couple of years studying the capacity building literature and had a great old time analysing what different people had to say about it. But, from my vantage point, I could not see the poor benefiting from all this 'capacity building'. So I was faced with a decision... Do I continue to survey my view and make further comments from afar? Do I look for another vista to study? (Hmmm... an appealing thought)! Or do I leave my perch and find out where the poor are amidst all the capacity building going on?

Getting on the plane to come to East Timor was another of those 'on the edge' experiences. Because the vast expanse between the United States (where I live) and East Timor can only be traversed by plane, I had to decide whether my fear of another 9/11 terrorist-type attack would keep me from my field studies. It seemed more appropriate (even considerate to my family), that my field studies be conducted closer to home. But my supervisor didn't see things quite that way, and Haiti (my 'legitimate' alternative) was overrun by a wave of anarchy. It was a matter of face my fears and travel to East Timor, find another perch from which to study the capacity building landscape, or, more appealing than both these options, redirect my energies into selling real estate (making up for my lack of income over the past seven years)!

I was no sooner in East Timor (much relieved about my safe arrival with *China Airlines*), when another 'on the edge' scenario came up. A married couple who had built an orphanage were holding a fancy Gala fund-raising event. Sadly, the husband was incapacitated with Dengue Fever. The wife (Ina) was struggling to get everything prepared for the big event. During a brief pause in her busy schedule, Ina spotted me walking by at a leisurely pace, absorbed in my own thoughts. After hearing Ina's predicament, I was overcome with that inner compulsion to say those (in)famous three words, "Can I help?" Anyone laughing right now would understand that those who utter that line in the midst of another's crisis are *immediately* thrown into a frenetic, exhausting whirlwind of activity, from which there is no escape. After yet another late night making final preparations for the Gala event, I thought "Hey, what am I here for? This involvement is getting out of hand! What about *my* mission?" Three weeks later, I was (re)introduced to 'my' mission; for I stayed with those for whom the Gala event was held: fourteen beautiful children whose fathers and mothers had died in the most horrendous circumstances. These were some of the poor who I did not see whilst sitting on my perch, viewing the capacity

building landscape. And there are many more poor people who I want to – *need to* – meet, in order to understand the relationship between capacity building and poverty reduction.

Management Committee Update

The last three months have been busy ones. Salman Jan visited Afghanistan and Sue Cunningham went to the Solomon Islands. Sue had an excellent trip and found our assistance over the last year has been a success. She identified how future support can complement and build on these results. Sue's trip will be detailed in the next newsletter.

In June we held an information and fundraising evening in Turrumurra, Sydney. Once again the positive feedback and generous support we received was extremely encouraging. We thank Jill and David Stevenson for hosting a wonderfully intimate and successful evening. As inspiring was our return visit to Adelaide where we presented information on Afghanistan and Borgegai to supporters who took us on trust last year when we promised to identify a project in Afghanistan they could support. Once again our generous hosts were Helen and Peter Reilly, and we thank them very much.

Over the next 6 months we will have similar events in Sydney (for IF members who missed out on the North Shore event), Canberra, Melbourne and Wollongong.

On the 7-8 August we will be holding our annual IF review and strategic planning weekend. If you would like to join us, or provide input into ways we can improve, you are most welcome. Please contact Sally Stevenson on 02 4226 2647.

Finally, we have attached an article on IF by Sarah Heinzman, published on 26 June in the The Illawarra Mercury's Weekender magazine. We hope you it!



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